

VZCZCXYZ0002
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHMO #0533/01 0631502
ZNR UUUUU ZZH (CCY AD39B0DB MSI4525-695)
P 041502Z MAR 09
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2231
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHXD/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS MOSCOW 000533

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D COPY CAPTION

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [RS](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: RUSSIAN ANALYSTS DISCUSS POSSIBILITIES FOR
AFGHANISTAN COOPERATION

¶1. (SBU) Summary. In a February 11 roundtable with
visiting SCA DAS Patrick Moon, Russian experts on Afghanistan
and Central Asia observed that Russia needed the U.S. to
succeed in Afghanistan as it lacked the psychological

capacity and the financial and military resources to get
directly involved in the country again. They argued
cooperation on Afghanistan should serve the strategic goal of
improving U.S.-Russian relations; conversely resolving some
of the more prickly issues such as missile defense and NATO
enlargement could help improve Russian willingness to
cooperate on Afghanistan. The analysts worried that some
degree of competition and zero-sum game between the U.S. and
Russia was inevitable given the energy, resource, and
strategic implications of the South and Central Asian region,
and discussed GOR claims that there was no link between
Russian assistance and Kyrgyzstan's decision to close Manas
air base. Nevertheless, they believed that Russia had
genuine concerns about the worsening situation in Afghanistan
and shared mutual interests with the U.S. in countering the
Taliban and ensuring stability. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) During his February 9-11 visit to Moscow for
Afghanistan consultations with the GOR (septel), Deputy
Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs
Patrick Moon held a roundtable discussion with Russian
experts. The attendees included Yevgeniy Volk of the
Heritage Foundation, Aleksandr Lukin of the Center for East
Asian and Shanghai Cooperation Organization Studies at the
Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO),
Gennadiy Chufirin of the Institute of World Economy and
International Relations (IMEMO), Aleksandr Golts of the
online publication The Daily Journal, and Sergey Kortunov of
the World Politics Department of the Higher School of
Economics.

Mutual Interests in Afghanistan

¶3. (SBU) The experts unanimously agreed that the U.S. and
Russia shared mutual interests in Afghanistan and that
cooperation was essential. Russia needed the U.S. to succeed
in Afghanistan, as the GOR lacked the financial and military
resources to play a leading role in countering the myriad of
challenges that could have destabilizing effects on the
region. Sergey Kortunov was particularly blunt in stating
that as Russia was psychologically incapable of getting
militarily involved in Afghanistan again, U.S. troops were
doing the job for Russia. The experts welcomed the recent
positive statements by the U.S. and the GOR on the need to
cooperate on Afghanistan and saw the February 10-11
consultations, the first face-to-face formal dialogue between
our two governments since President Obama's inauguration, as
a positive step in "resetting" the bilateral relationship.

14. (SBU) The analysts stated that cooperation on Afghanistan should serve the larger strategic goal of a better U.S.-Russian relationship, one characterized by respect and mutual cooperation. They all dismissed GOR claims that there was no link between Russian assistance to Kyrgyzstan and Bakiyev's decision to close Manas air base. Respect and the wish to be taken seriously as the country with a historical dominance and special interests in Central Asia were behind these machinations, they contended. They suggested that Russia believed it had not been treated as an equal by the U.S., and now that Russia had recovered from its weakened state of the 1990s, the GOR was sending reminders that Moscow was at the center when it came to security issues in the region. Thus, while the GOR seemed to be giving mixed signals, offering transit rights to the U.S. and NATO on the one hand but allegedly engineering behind-the-scenes the closure of Manas on the other, in reality, it had a clear strategy to induce the U.S. away from individual Central Asian governments toward dealing with Russia. They argued that Manas was a minor and transitory issue that could be resolved relatively quickly through negotiations with Moscow. The way it was resolved, however, should contribute to the overall understanding between Washington and Moscow on the direction of the bilateral relationship.

And Vice Versa

15. (SBU) At the same time, the overall direction of the bilateral relationship and the resolution of important strategic issues could help determine the degree to which the U.S. and Russia cooperated on Afghanistan. Aleksandr Golts observed that Moscow took a global view of its relations with

the U.S. and had often been frustrated by Washington's cherry-picking approach, seeking cooperation on some issues, disagreeing on a few issues of importance to Russia, and simply ignoring Russian views on others. Noting that the GOR tended not to compartmentalize in such a manner, the experts suggested that Moscow, in its wish to emphasize that cooperation was a two-way street, wanted the U.S. to compromise on issues such as missile defense and NATO enlargement in exchange for meaningful collaboration on Afghanistan. IMEMO's Gennadiy Chufrin observed that how the U.S. set the tone for the bilateral relationship, whether one of cooperation or competition, could determine the range of possible joint activities between our two countries and the degree to which Russia would be willing to be helpful on Afghanistan. If the U.S. chose cooperation--with the implied compromises on the more strategic issues of NATO, missile defense, and START--the transit of military equipment through Russia was a possibility in addition to the current agreement on the transit of non-lethal supplies to ISAF. What both governments must avoid, Chufrin stressed, was the temptation to start a modern version of the Great Game, which was not in the real interests of either country.

Is Zero-Sum Unavoidable?

16. (SBU) Yet parts of the Russian government may indeed have the Great Game or a zero-sum game in mind, some of the experts suggested. According to Sergey Kortunov, if the GOR was behind the Kyrgyz announcement on Manas, it meant that there were influential voices in the Russian security forces who held zero-sum views and that they had succeeded in pushing a bad policy onto the Russian decision-makers. Others agreed that the GOR might be more interested in using Afghanistan as a card in a bigger global game, even though Russia had genuine concerns about the potential spill-over effects of instability in Afghanistan. Yevgeniy Volk argued that Washington should be realistic about the scope of U.S.-Russian cooperation on Afghanistan, as a certain degree of competition was inevitable because of the enormous energy, natural resources, and strategic implications of the South

and Central Asian region. In some cases, competition might overshadow the inclination to cooperate.

17. (SBU) In response to DAS Moon's question on whether competition or zero-sum was truly inevitable, Golts answered that as long as mutual deterrence remained the foundation of our bilateral relationship, the two countries would inevitably turn to competition whenever problems arose, no matter how much talk of cooperation existed. In this regard, the U.S. should remedy the Bush Administration's mistake of steadily ignoring disarmament, and resolve the outstanding START issue as soon as possible. Otherwise, the basic foundation of the relationship would always be fundamentally zero-sum.

Genuine Concerns about Afghanistan

18. (SBU) Despite their views on Russia's inclination to view Afghanistan through the prism of strategic interests vis-a-vis the U.S., the experts were unequivocal that Russia, as well as the Central Asian countries, had genuine concerns about the situation in Afghanistan. According to them, the pervasive view in Russia and Central Asia was that the security situation was worsening and drug trafficking in the region was increasing. For countries such as Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in particular, the narcotics problem was growing, fueled by both internal factors as well as the supply from Afghanistan. Lukin argued that Kyrgyzstan's decision to close Manas was not just about money and pressure from Moscow; it also reflected Bishkek's dissatisfaction with a perceived U.S. inability to stabilize Afghanistan and ensure security in Central Asia. The Central Asian countries were questioning whether the U.S. could guarantee their security as well as Russia could. The Manas announcement was thus Bishkek's way of signaling that it was seeking alternative security guarantees from the region, including Russia, the SCO, and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

19. (SBU) The experts were skeptical of recent poll results from groups such as the Asia Foundation that suggested only 15 percent of the Afghan population supported the Taliban, noting that they had seen other data indicating that the Taliban's support base was growing, possibly as high as 30 percent. Even assuming the 15 percent figure to be accurate, this still indicated an enormous capacity for sustained guerrilla warfare, they noted. Golts warned the U.S. not to repeat the Soviet mistake of putting undue focus on civil

reconstruction projects as a way to demonstrate an improved situation in the country, as they came at the expense of addressing the more urgent security challenges. Lukin agreed that getting control of the security situation was the top priority, and in this connection questioned the wisdom of focusing too much attention on the democratization process and the voter registration efforts for the upcoming presidential elections. In his view, introducing too much democracy at this stage was dangerous, as Afghanistan needed first and foremost a leader who could have effective control of the country, rather than a leader who could get the most votes.

BEYRLE